

The Lion and the Hare Go Hunting

An African (Ethiopian) Tale

In Ethiopia the hare, like the jackal and the monkey, is known by all of the other animals for his cleverness. His reputation is widespread through the mountains and the grasslands. Even the largest beasts, such as the lion and the leopard, respect him.

It is said that once the lion caught the hare and was about to eat him.

"Why does your mouth water so when you look at me?" the hare asked.

"Are you not meat?" the lion asked in surprise.

"But I am so small and thin," the hare said. "After you have eaten me you will still be hungry. Why don't we go hunting together for something large and fat?"

"You go hunting?" the lion laughed. "What could such a ridiculous animal as you catch?"

"Let us go to the village where men live," the hare said. "If we don't find something fatter than I, then you may eat me."

So the lion and the hare went together and prowled around the edge of the village where men lived, and on its outskirts the lion captured a fat young bull. The hare also hunted, but he found nothing but a mangy donkey who was rolling on its back in the dust of the trail.

As they drove their booty home, the hare looked with envy at the lion's fat bull, and his mouth watered. Finally, he said: "Ah, lion, what bad luck you've had!"

"How?" the lion said in surprise.

"Your poor bull is so thin and undernourished. You'd have been better off eating me."

The lion looked suspiciously at his prize and then at the donkey. "He doesn't look so thin to me," the lion said.

"Everyone knows that when you strike a fat animal he gives off steam," the hare said.

The lion didn't know about that, but he replied: "Yes, everyone knows that."

He picked up a stick and struck his bull across the back, but there was no steam. He struck again. Still there was no steam. "See, he is fat," the lion said without conviction.

"No, he has been starved nearly to death," the hare said. And he struck his thin scraggly donkey across the back. A cloud of dust rose in the air. It was the dust from the trail where the donkey had been rolling.

"Ah!" the hare said. "That is a fat animal for you!"

The lion thought for a moment and then he said: "I will take the donkey and you will take the bull!"

"Oh, no, that's impossible," the hare said, looking reproachfully at the lion. "It was I who caught the donkey, and it is I who shall eat him."

The lion became angry.

"Very well," the hare said with a tone of disappointment. "So it shall be."

So the lion took the mangy donkey and the hare took the fat young bull. They continued on their way. As they went along the trail, the hare picked up eight eagle feathers and put them in his belt like knives. When they stopped to rest, the hare said:

"Lion, I have a set of eight light hunting knives. If I lose one I still have seven left. But you, the mighty hunter, you have only one. What will you do if you lose it?"

The lion thought about this for a moment, and then he said: "The mighty hunter should have the weapons, not the smallest and most insignificant of all animals. Let us trade."

"Oh, that would be impossible," the hare said. "Since I am so small I need more weapons rather than less."

"Do you argue with me?" the lion said with temper.

"Very well, here they are. I am not a man to argue with you."

He gave the lion the eight eagle feathers and took the lion's knife, and they continued on their way.

When they came to the lion's cave, the hare stopped and looked at it. It had a single door. He shook his head and clicked his tongue.

"Yes," he said, "just as I thought---your house is a trap."

"What are you saying?" the lion asked in surprise.

"Only a single door," the hare said. "Aren't you afraid?"

"I'm afraid of nothing that moves!" the lion roared. "Where is there anything for me to fear?"

"Aren't you afraid of Men?"

"Men! Ah, well, only of Men . . ."

"Look at my house over there," the hare said. "It has many entrances. If a hunter comes into my house looking for me by one door, then I leave by another. And if he enters by the second door I leave by the third. But if a hunter were to enter your house, where would you go?"

"You are right!" the lion said. "I never before thought of it! We shall trade!"

"Trade? Oh, no, I couldn't," the hare said. "I don't care to live in a trap!"

The lion looked very severely at the hare. So the hare said hurriedly: "Very well, if you insist upon it!"

So the hare and the lion changed houses.

Hare went into Lion's house and closed the door. He killed his bull and cooked it and grew fatter than before.

The lion moved into the hare's cave. Then he took one of the eagle feathers from his belt and tried to kill his donkey with it. The feather could not kill the donkey. It only tickled him. The lion took another feather from his belt and tried to kill the donkey. It tickled the donkey worse. He laughed. He couldn't stop laughing. The lion took out another feather and tried to kill the donkey. It tickled the donkey so that he couldn't stand it any more. He broke loose from the lion and escaped into the fields.

And now, whenever the donkey thinks of how the lion tickled him with eagle feathers he laughs. You can hear it for yourself.